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OPERATIONAL MANEUVER: CREATOR OF THE DECISIVE POINT(U)  
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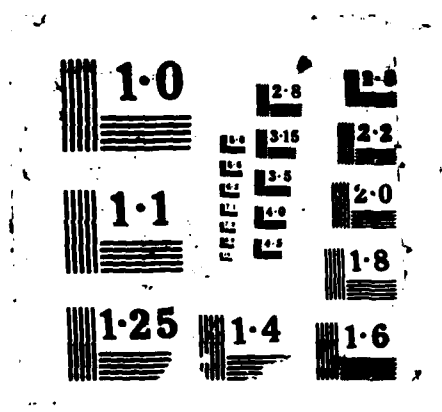
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CREATOR OF THE DECISIVE POINT

BY

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FORT LEAVENWORTH, KANSAS

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87-3065

10 105

AD-A 185 078

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved  
OMB No 0704-0188  
Exp Date Jun 30, 1986

1a REPORT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION <b>UNCLASSIFIED</b>			1b. RESTRICTIVE MARKINGS		
2a SECURITY CLASSIFICATION AUTHORITY			3. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY OF REPORT  APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE: DISTRIBUTION UNLIMITED		
2b DECLASSIFICATION / DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE			5. MONITORING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)		
4 PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)			7a. NAME OF MONITORING ORGANIZATION		
6a NAME OF PERFORMING ORGANIZATION SCHOOL OF ADVANCED MILITARY STUDIES, USAC&GSC		6b. OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable) ATZL - SWV	7b. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)		
6c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) FT LEAVENWORTH, KANSAS 66027 - 6900			9. PROCUREMENT INSTRUMENT IDENTIFICATION NUMBER		
8a. NAME OF FUNDING / SPONSORING ORGANIZATION		8b. OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable)	10. SOURCE OF FUNDING NUMBERS		
8c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)			PROGRAM ELEMENT NO.	PROJECT NO.	TASK NO.
			WORK UNIT ACCESSION NO.		
11. TITLE (Include Security Classification) OPERATIONAL MANEUVER: CREATOR OF THE DECISIVE POINT (U)					
12. PERSONAL AUTHOR(S) MAJOR HENRY PAUL STUART					
13a. TYPE OF REPORT MONOGRAPH		13b. TIME COVERED FROM _____ TO _____		14. DATE OF REPORT (Year, Month, Day) 87/5/1	
				15. PAGE COUNT 45	
16. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTATION					
17. COSATI CODES			18. SUBJECT TERMS (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)		
FIELD	GROUP	SUB-GROUP	MANEUVER		
			DECISIVE POINT		
			BATTLE OF ULM		
			OPERATIONAL MANEUVER		
			BATTLE OF FRANCE		
19 ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number) This monograph inquires into the nature of operational maneuver by addressing the following research question: Can operational maneuver be used to create the decisive point? It uses the following methodology to answer this question. First, it discusses both operational maneuver and the decisive point. Next, it examines three historical examples of operational maneuver to establish a relationship between operational maneuver and the decisive point. It also uses these examples to illustrate factors that are prerequisites for operational maneuver to create the decisive point. Finally, it examines current U.S. Army doctrine to see what the doctrine says about operational maneuver, the decisive point and the prerequisites for successful operational maneuver. The monograph draws three conclusions. First, operational maneuver can create the decisive point. Next, U.S. Army doctrine uses the term decisive point but does not define what the term means. (Continued on other side of form)					
20. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY OF ABSTRACT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNCLASSIFIED/UNLIMITED <input type="checkbox"/> SAME AS RPT <input type="checkbox"/> DTIC USERS			21 ABSTRACT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION UNCLASSIFIED		
22a NAME OF RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL MAJOR HENRY PAUL STUART			22b TELEPHONE (Include Area Code) (913) 684 2138		22c OFFICE SYMBOL ATZL - SWV

**BLOCK 19: ABSTRACT (CONTINUED)**

Furthermore, the doctrine does not clearly link operational maneuver to the decisive point. Finally, the prerequisites for operational maneuver that are illustrated in the examples of operational maneuver are listed in the doctrine, but with the linkage of operational maneuver to the decisive point there may be other factors (such as surprise, risk taking, or a strong attack at a weak point) that come into play.

SCHOOL OF ADVANCED MILITARY STUDIES  
MONOGRAPH APPROVAL

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TITLE OF MONOGRAPH: OPERATIONAL MANEUVER: CREATOR OF THE  
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## ABSTRACT

OPERATIONAL MANEUVER: CREATOR OF THE DECISIVE POINT by MAJ  
H. Paul Stuart, USA, 45 Pages.

→ This monograph inquires into the nature of operational maneuver by addressing the following research question: Can operational maneuver be used to create the decisive point?

It uses the following methodology to answer this question. First, it discusses both operational maneuver and the decisive point. Next, it examines three historical examples of operational maneuver to establish a relationship between operational maneuver and the decisive point. It also uses these examples to illustrate factors that are prerequisites for operational maneuver to create the decisive point. Finally, it examines current U.S. Army doctrine to see what the doctrine says about operational maneuver, the decisive point and the prerequisites for successful operational maneuver.

The monograph draws three conclusions. First, operational maneuver can create the decisive point. Next, U.S. Army doctrine uses the term decisive point but does not define what the term means. Furthermore, the doctrine does not clearly link operational maneuver to the decisive point. Finally, the prerequisites for operational maneuver that are illustrated in the examples of operational maneuver are listed in the doctrine, but with the linkage of operational maneuver to the decisive point there may be other factors (such as surprise, risk taking, or a strong attack at a weak point) that come into play.



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## OPERATIONAL MANEUVER: CREATOR OF THE DECISIVE POINT

### I. Introduction.

When it published Field Manual (FM) 100-5 in May 1982, the U.S. Army added the operational level of war to its doctrine. Although it was "new" to contemporary U.S. Army doctrine, the operational level of war was not a new concept. Long ago, military theorists recognized that there are distinct levels of war. In his widely known treatise On War Clausewitz, the famed Prussian military thinker and writer, recognized two levels (1): tactics - "...the use of armed forces in the engagement" and strategy - "...the use of engagements for the object of war", the latter being what is called now the operational level of war. Jomini, another well known theorist, provided further distinction of the concept in his work, The Art of War. He wrote, "Strategy [again what is recognized as the operational level of war] decides where to act; logistics brings the troops to this point; grand tactics decides the manner of execution and the employment of the troops".(2)

In fact, in years past U.S. Army doctrine included the concept of the operational level of war. In the 1930's one manual used by the Command and General Staff School [today's Command and General Staff College] included three levels of war: "...conduct of war (strategy), strategy (operations) and tactics (tactics)".(3) This is how we define it today,

bringing doctrine full circle by returning to a concept that is useful in describing war and warfare.

About four years after reintroduction of the concept, the U.S. Army has published another edition of FM 100-5 that further refines the doctrine concerning the operational level of war. This version makes it clear that one of the ingredients for success at this level is maneuver: "At the operational level of war, large unit commanders mass or maneuver tactical formations to bring the enemy to battle under the best terms possible".(4) It implies, furthermore, that operational maneuver should be used against the decisive point by stating, "In trying to mass decisive strength at the decisive point, commanders maintain contact with the enemy and adjust their movements to conceal their intentions and to bring their forces to bear against an enemy vulnerability".(5)

This monograph inquires into the nature of operational maneuver by addressing the following research question: Can operational maneuver be used to create the decisive point? It uses the following methodology to answer this question. First, it discusses both operational maneuver and the decisive point. Next, it examines three historical examples of operational maneuver to establish a relationship between operational maneuver and the decisive point. It also uses these examples to illustrate factors that are prerequisites for operational maneuver to create the decisive point.

Finally, it examines current U.S. Army doctrine to see what the doctrine says about operational maneuver, the decisive point, and the prerequisites for successful operational maneuver.

The monograph draws three conclusions. First, operational maneuver can create the decisive point. Next, U.S. Army doctrine uses the term decisive point but does not define what the term means. Furthermore, the doctrine does not clearly link operational maneuver to the decisive point. Finally, the prerequisites for operational maneuver that are illustrated in the historical examples are listed in the doctrine, but with the linkage of operational maneuver to the decisive point there may be other factors (such as surprise, risk taking or a strong attack at a weak point) that come into play.

## II. Operational Maneuver and the Decisive Point.

Before establishing a relationship between operational maneuver and the decisive point, it is necessary to discuss these terms. This allows a consistent understanding of their meaning and usage in later parts of this monograph.

What is operational maneuver? FM 100-5 defines the term when it says

Operational maneuver seeks a decisive impact on the conduct of a campaign. It attempts to gain advantage of position before battle and to exploit tactical successes to achieve operational results.(6)

From this definition one may deduce three points about operational maneuver. First, it attempts to achieve, though it does not guarantee, a favorable decision for the campaign. Second, it implies that if fighting or placing fire upon the enemy establishes an advantage (tactical success), then this advantage will be used either in parallel or sequentially with other tactical successes to produce new ones. This process will be repeated until a decision is reached in the campaign (operational result). Finally, the key to achieving a favorable decision in the campaign is to position all or part of the force before each period of significant fighting so that it is in a location which will increase the likelihood of a favorable decision.

From this last point then, operational maneuver is directed against a physical point on the ground. However, the definition does not name this point. For aid in doing

this, one must leave the definition of operational maneuver and go to the definition of simple "maneuver". FM 100-5 says that "It [maneuver] is the means of concentrating forces at the critical point..."(7) But what is the "critical point": It does not say. However, it is explicit concerning the effects if maneuver does hit this critical point: surprise, psychological shock, physical momentum, and moral dominance.(8)

But from examining the effects of striking the critical point with maneuver, one may conclude that the term critical point is synonymous with the term "decisive point", one which is defined in military theory.

Jomini provides a definition of decisive point when he writes

...a decisive point, the possession of which, more than of any other, helps to secure victory, by enabling its holder to make a proper application of the principles of war: arrangements should therefore be made for striking the decisive blow upon this point.(9)

In fact, Jomini relates operational maneuver to the decisive point in his "Principle of War" which as he says is

...embraced in the following maxims:

To throw by strategic movements [recall that this term is synonymous with today's operational level of war] the mass of an army, upon the decisive points of a theater of war, and also upon the communications of the enemy as much as possible without compromising one's own.

To maneuver to engage fractions of the hostile army with the bulk of one's forces.

On the battle-field, to throw the mass of the forces upon the decisive point, or upon that portion of the hostile line which it is of the first importance to overthrow.

To so arrange that these masses should not only be thrown upon the decisive point, but that they shall engage at the proper times and with energy.(10)

Jomini is also useful in providing some assistance in identifying decisive points. He says that decisive points are determined by three factors. First, the "features of the ground" help to determine a decisive point, and in fact he has a name for this type of decisive point: decisive geographic point. Second the positions occupied by the respective forces helps to determine a decisive point, and again he has a name for this type: accidental points of maneuver. Finally, the relation of local features to the ultimate strategic aim helps to determine a decisive point.(11)

From this one can see that the field of campaign on which a force can perform operational maneuver can have a number of decisive points. The key for the operational commander becomes accurately selecting these decisive points, then sequencing operational forces with operational maneuver to occupy those that will have the most significant favorable effects upon the campaign. The decisive points that are selected then become the objectives of the operational maneuver.

### III. Historical Examples of Operational Maneuver.

History is one means of gaining a perspective on the present and future. What has happened in the past may not, probably will not, be exactly replicated again, but historical events may be used to see if propositions about the present or future are possible.

This section will present three historical examples in which operational maneuver was used to create the decisive point. It will also present factors from each example that were instrumental in this process. The first example will examine operational maneuver as performed by Napoleon before the Battle of Ulm. The second example, the Battle of France in 1940, will examine operational maneuver in a purely offensive framework. The final example, Manstein's Winter Campaign in 1943, will examine operational maneuver in a defensive situation.

#### The Battle of Ulm

(See Map A at Page 33)

The Treaty of Amlens ended the war against the Second Coalition in 1802. However, it did not resolve the differences that existed between Britain and France. As a result, war resumed between these two countries in 1803. Initially, neither side could act directly against the other, so the British navy blockaded France, and France seized Hanover, Britain's sole continental possession.(12)

For over a year Napoleon assembled troops and shipping in order to conduct an invasion of England. In preparation for the invasion, he deployed the seven corps that comprised his army along a line that ran from Hanover to Brest. But political events moved apace with Britain, Austria, Russia, Naples and Sweden forming the Third Coalition in the summer of 1805. It was clear by this time that there was little hope of invading England and in August, having received intelligence of Allied dispositions, Napoleon abandoned the effort and swiftly deployed his army eastward.(13)

The Allies believed that Napoleon would make his main campaign in northern Italy so they disposed a 95,000 man army there under Archduke Charles to fight what they believed would be Napoleon's main effort. Ferdinand and General Mack led the 70,000 man Austrian Army into Bavaria to discourage the ruler of Bavaria from cooperating with the French as they moved through it. The Russians promised to provide a 95,000 man force that would be provided in three separate armies, one of which was a 35,000 man contingent that was to link up with the Austrian Army in Bavaria in October 1805.(14)

Napoleon developed a very bold plan to defeat the members of the Coalition individually. He decided to fight his main effort not in Italy, but along the Danube River, while conducting economy of force operations in other theaters. He would destroy the Austrians in Bavaria before



the Russian Army linked up, then defeat the remainder of the Allies. Napoleon anticipated that the Danube would be the key to the defeat of the Austrians for once his army was on the Danube, concentrated south of Donauworth, he would be able to prevent the union of the Russians with the Austrians. Thus, Napoleon anticipated and planned to use operational maneuver to create the decisive point.(15)

Napoleon executed his plan swiftly and aggressively. On 26 August orders were issued which began the movement of his seven corps toward the Danube River. To facilitate speed and logistics support, the corps traveled on separate routes and converged on the Danube. Napoleon dispatched reconnaissance parties to keep him abreast of the movement of the Austrians as they entered Bavaria.

On 24 September, the French Army crossed the Rhine River, and on the next day the French cavalry, commanded by Murat, began a diversionary operation to draw the Austrians farther into Bavaria. By 6 October, the French had seized crossings over the Danube and were enveloping the Austrian Army. To prevent the Austrians from interfering with his lines of communications, Napoleon had Marshal Ney conduct a fixing attack with his corps.

While these moves were taking place, the Austrian Army moved into the city of Ulm. However, it was too late for this army was surrounded. On 14 October, Ferdinand managed

to escape with part of the cavalry, and on 20 October Mack surrendered the remainder of the army.

The results of the battle were impressive. As the 8th Bulletin of the Grande Armee recounts them, they were

Thirty thousand men, among them 2,000 cavalry, together with 60 guns and 40 standards have fallen into the hands of the victors...Since the beginning of the war, the total number of prisoners can be evaluated at 60,000, the number of standards at 80 without listing the artillery or baggage trains...Never have victories been so complete and less costly.(16)

Furthermore, this battle set the stage for the even more decisive battle over the Allies six weeks later at Austerlitz.

The Battle of Ulm was preceded by operational maneuver that created the decisive point at the Danube River. Three factors stand out as being essential in this operational maneuver creating the decisive point.

The first factor is Napoleon's anticipation that the Danube River would be the decisive point in this battle. Why the Danube? As Chandler says, "Mack was strategically defeated the moment Napoleon reached the Danube".(17) Napoleon obviously saw that this maneuver would place his army in the rear of the Austrian Army. This would have two effects. It would demoralize the Austrians, and probably more importantly, it would cut off the lines of communication with the approaching Russian Army.

A second factor is the speed and mobility with which the French Army operated. Prior to this battle, Napoleon was able to move his army, comprising 226 battalions, 233 squadrons, 161 artillery and sapper companies, and a general staff of 1,108 for a grand total of 210,500 men including 396 guns, more than 200 miles in only 13 days. A typical day's march for an element of the army was about 18 miles (30 kilometers).(18)

One of the primary reasons for this rapid tempo of operations was the corps system into which the French Army was organized. This system, which grouped several divisions into one large combined arms organization, permitted each corps to move along an independent route of march, thus not interfering with the movement or logistical support of a sister corps. Even though it marched separately, each corps still remained within supporting distance of another corps, usually one or two days separation. A second reason for the rapid movement was the logistics system used to support the army. The supply trains were issued with four days ration of bread and as many more of biscuit to be issued only if a major action was imminent. This prevented the corps from having to "live off the land", thus freeing them from having to search for food.(19)

A third factor which resulted in operational maneuver creating the decisive point was the use of cavalry to demonstrate before the approaching Austrians. Napoleon used

Murat's cavalry corps to move directly at the Austrians and induce them to move deeper into Bavaria. This plan began on 25 September and by 27 September Napoleon was certain that the demonstration and deception had succeeded for the Austrians had moved into the defiles of the Black Forest.(20) This drew them further westward, lengthening the distance between them and the Russians. This gave the French the additional time needed to concentrate the French Army at the Danube River, the decisive point.

In summary, Napoleon used operational maneuver to concentrate his Grande Armee at the decisive point which he anticipated as being the Danube River. The means to accomplish this maneuver was rapid mobility provided by the corps system which was supported by the relatively efficient logistics tail. Furthermore, Napoleon helped create the decisive point by using his cavalry to demonstrate for the Austrians, thus lengthening their distance from possible supporting forces.

As demonstrated by this example, Napoleon was a master of operational maneuver, using it to create the decisive point. But what has happened in more recent history with more modern weapon systems and organizations? Let us now advance to May 1940 in the Battle of France for a more contemporary example.

## The Battle of France

(See Map B at Page 34)

Hitler decided in the Fall of 1939 to defeat the Allied armies on the continent and directed his High Command to develop a plan to achieve this end. The first plan developed was called Plan Yellow, which called for

Engaging and destroying the largest possible elements of the French Army in Northern France and Belgium, thereby creating favorable conditions for the prosecution of the war against Britain and France by land and air.(21)

The goal of this plan was to destroy Allied forces north of the Somme, then to drive through to the Channel Coast.(22)

The French, along with the British, anticipated this modern Schlieffen Plan and planned to move forward into Belgium with their armies to a defensive line along the Dyle River, thus blocking the German Armies before they moved into France. The Allied determination to execute the Dyle Plan was reinforced by the Menchelen Incident in which a copy of Plan Yellow fell into Belgian hands and was passed to the French. This incident caused the French further to strengthen the forces that would move into Belgium.

General Von Manstein developed the German plan (called Sichelschnitt) which was ultimately used to conduct the invasion in May 1940. Manstein saw that to defeat the Allied Armies would require a maneuver to sever from France the armies that moved forward into Belgium. By enveloping

and destroying this mass of armies, maneuver would effectively destroy the preponderance of Allied combat power. It would then be a relatively simple matter to attack and secure the remainder of France.

Manstein saw the lower Somme around Abbeville as being the decisive point. Once German forces had reached this point, the lines of communication and lines of retreat of the Allied Armies in Belgium would be cut.

In order to achieve this move to the lower Somme in sufficient time and in sufficient force to prevent the escape of the Allies in Belgium, two things had to occur. First, a supporting attack had to fix the Allied Armies in Belgium by applying just enough pressure to tie them down and to keep them from withdrawing back into France. The pressure could not be so great as to force these armies back before the trap was closed. Second, the enveloping force had to move rapidly and decisively to the lower Somme. Herein lay the need for panzer divisions because they had the requisite speed, combat power and shock effect necessary to effect the encirclement.

Furthermore, the tank attack had to occur at a place which would permit the encirclement of the Allied Armies. Manstein chose the Ardennes as the initial point of attack for not only would it permit the panzer forces to move to the decisive point, it would also allow them to strike the

French at a place that they would least likely expect it--the "impenetrable" Ardennes.

The Germans finally attacked on 10 May 1940, having delayed the invasion a number of times during the months prior. As planned, they attacked with supporting attacks by two army groups: Army Group B attacked into Holland and Belgium to fix Allied forces; Army Group C conducted a limited attack to fix French forces along the Maginot Line. Army Group A conducted the main attack which moved three armies through the Ardennes to strike along the boundary between the 9th and the 2nd French Armies.

The execution of the plan went even better than expected. By 13 May the Germans had crossed the Meuse River and were on their way to the English Channel. The attack paralyzed the French chain of command for they did not even know what was happening. The speed of the penetration and exploitation went so well that it even surprised the Germans for they halted the attack by the panzers for a full day while infantry forces closed with the tanks to protect the lines of communications running back to the Meuse River. By 20 May the panzers of Army Group A were at Abbeville on the lower Somme, the decisive point, thus sealing off the Allied forces that had moved into Belgium. The attack continued to complete destruction of these encircled forces, but Hitler halted it from 24 - 27 May for reasons that remain unclear. During this hiatus the famed Dunkirk evacuation occurred.

However, it was still an operationally decisive victory for it destroyed the flower of the French Army and eliminated the Allies from the continent.

Using this success as a springboard, the Germans reoriented their armies southward, and on 5 June proceeded to drive into the heart of France to complete its conquest. On 14 June Paris surrendered, and before the end of the month Hitler had accepted the surrender of the remainder of France.

In this example, as in the previous one, there were certain factors that led to operational maneuver creating the decisive point. As Napoleon did prior to the Battle of Ulm, Manstein anticipated the decisive point--the lower Somme River. He saw that if the Germans could move powerful panzer forces to this point before the Allies could withdraw from Belgium, they would entrap these Allied forces and permit their destruction. Thus, Manstein anticipated that the operational maneuver would create the decisive point.

Strength versus weakness was the second factor which led to operational maneuver creating the decisive point. The German attack put the German panzers along the boundary between the 9th and 2nd French Armies. Furthermore, both of these armies were not manned by the best French soldiers and, consequently, were relatively weak. This led to a rapid breakthrough and hastened the movement of the panzer forces to the lower Somme. Nine of the ten available panzer



divisions struck the 9th French army a concentrated killing blow, creating more confusion because they struck along the seam between two armies.

Very closely allied to this factor of strength against weakness is the third factor of surprise. The Germans placed their main attack in a place where the French did not expect it to come. This allowed the main maneuver forces, the panzers of Army Group A, to blash rapidly through the weak French forces, then to speed to the English Channel. The surprise was created by the place of attack, the Ardennes, and the method of attack, the panzers.

The final factor was the speed of the attack and the rapidity with which it progressed to the decisive point. In only ten days, the German panzers moved about 200 miles. This included a full day's halt while follow-on infantry closed-up to protect the German lines of communication. The speed of the attack enabled the Germans to move quickly to the lower Somme, the decisive point.

One may conclude from this example that operational maneuver can create the decisive point in a purely offensive campaign. This example demonstrates that one method to do this is to concentrate overwhelming combat power in a surprise attack at a weak point, then move forces rapidly along an axis that again leads to concentration at the decisive point. The decisive point then severs the lines of communication or lines of retreat of major enemy forces.

Let us now look at what can happen in a defensive campaign. Can operational maneuver be used to create the decisive point in this situation?

### Manstein's Winter Campaign in 1943

(See Map C at Page 35)

In January 1943 the Germans were on the defensive in the Soviet Union. By this time the German 6th Army at Stalingrad was surrounded and on the verge of destruction. Attempts to save it in late 1942 had failed.

The Soviets were enjoying great success in offensive operations against the Germans on the southern front. Their operations in January had torn a gaping hole in the German line, which resulted in a drive toward the Dnepr River crossings by major Soviet forces. Once these forces reached the Dnepr they would cut the lines of communication of the Don Army Group, thus surrounding it as well as Army Group A to its south.

The German forces that were in the southern part of the Soviet Union were in a precarious position at best. Don Army Group, commanded by Field Marshal Von Manstein, was holding a very tenuous front that extended across the Don River to the east of Rostov on the Sea of Azov. To the south of Don Army Group, Army Group A was operating in the Caucasus Mountains. Don Army Group was holding a front described by Manstein as a "balcony". The Army Group had two missions. First, it had to keep the lines of communication

open through Rostov for Army Group A, in essence protecting the rear of Army Group A. Second, it had to protect its own lines of communication that ran through the cities of Zaparozhye and Dnepropetrovsk on the Dnepr River.

To accomplish these tasks, Manstein saw several requirements. First, Army Group A had to reposition itself out of the Caucasus Mountains so that it could more adequately tie in with 4th Panzer Army that was defending along the lower Don River on the right flank of Don Army Group. In addition, the 1st Panzer Army, then operating on Army Group A's left flank, would have to leave Army Group A, "leap frog" the 4th Panzer Army, then move to a position to protect Don Army Group's lines of communication. The 4th Panzer Army would then have to move across the lower Don to positions that would allow it to be used in a counterattack against the Soviet forces that were attacking toward the Dnepr crossings. Manstein saw that it was possible for operational maneuver to create the decisive point in this campaign.

Manstein had a very difficult time getting Hitler's approval for these movements because Hitler was very much opposed to giving up any territory that his armies had captured. However, Hitler was finally convinced of the seriousness of the situation and approved the movement of 1st and 4th Panzer Armies back across the Don River. The 1st Panzer Army began its movement northward across the Don

River to the middle Donetz on 27 January.(23) On 7 February Manstein then began the movement of 4th Panzer Army back across the Don and positioned it for a counterattack on the western wing of the Army Group.(24) In addition, the SS Panzer Corps that was assembling near Kharkov was made available for Manstein's use in the counterattack.

On 19 February Manstein ordered 4th Panzer Army to deploy for its counterattack.(25) This Army was to conduct a dual pincer counterattack with two panzer corps converging to surround Soviet forces at Pavlograd. The SS Panzer Corps would attack from the northwest near Krasnograd and link up with an attack by the 48th Panzer Corps. The junction of these corps would cut off and isolate the lead elements of the Soviet 6th Army which was pressing its attack toward the Dnepr River crossings. Concurrently, the 40th Panzer Corps of 1st Panzer Army would attack to surround and destroy the elements of the Soviet Mobile Group Popov.(26)

The sequencing of the pincers was critical. By 20 February, the 40th Panzer Corps had already begun its attack. The SS Panzer Corps began its attack the same day. The 48th Panzer Corps was still enroute to its positions and would not arrive until 23 February. By having the SS Panzer Corps attack first, Manstein was able to have the double pincer attack converge simultaneously near Pavlograd.(27)

Because the Soviets were surprised by the 4th Panzer Army's multiple attacks, these attacks were very successful.

By 24 February the SS Panzer Corps had linked up with 48th Panzer Corps, and the corps prepared to continue the attack northward toward Kharkov. The operational maneuver had created the decisive point and, thus, had destroyed the mobile Soviet forces, regained the initiative, and set the stage for a further drive to the north.

What were the factors that led to operational maneuver creating the decisive point in this example of a defensive operation? There appear to be at least two.

As in the previous examples, Manstein anticipated the decisive point. He foresaw that the Soviets would try to take advantage of the "balcony" that was created because of the overextension of Army Group A and Don Army Group across the Don River into the Caucasus Mountains. His assessment proved to be correct by the offensives that the Soviets launched in January and February 1943, which were intended to seize the crossings across the Dnepr River.

Because of this obvious German vulnerability, Manstein foresaw that the only practical means to prevent the destruction of the German forces in the south was to reinforce Don Army Group with 1st Panzer Army from Army Group A, then to move his 4th Panzer Army to a position on his west wing, all so that his Army Group could counterattack. When the SS Panzer Corps became available for use in the counterattack, he then realized that a double envelopment by the corps of 4th Panzer Army plus an attack

by the 40th Panzer Corps of 1st Army would separate the Soviet tank corps that were attacking southward and set them up for destruction. Thus, he anticipated that the decisive point would be in the vicinity of Pavlograd. Once these tank forces were destroyed, he would have the initiative and would be able to continue the attack to Kharkov.

A second significant factor in creating the decisive point was Manstein's risk taking along other parts of his line so that he could concentrate the main element of his combat power, the panzers, for the counterattack. To prepare for the counterattack, Manstein moved all panzer forces from the line being held along the Mius River by Army Detachment Hollidt so that they could be used in the counterattack. As Glantz says

Manstein's plan called for the operational use of virtually all of Army Group "South's" scarce armored forces in a concentrated drive against exploiting forces of Soviet 6th Army, Group Popov, and 1st Guards Army.(28)

By this realignment of forces he set the stage for the "killing blow" against the Soviets. The lesson here is that in order to concentrate forces at the decisive point, an operational commander may have to take significant risk in some places along his front by thinning his forces to permit concentration in other places.

One may see from this example that operational maneuver can be used to create the decisive point in a defensive situation by risk taking and by shifting forces relative to

the enemy. This will permit the operational commander to achieve concentration. He may then strike a powerful blow at the anticipated decisive point such as along lines of communication of an attacking force. The maneuver thus creates the decisive point.

#### IV. U.S. Army Doctrine Concerning Operational Maneuver and the Decisive Point.

The analysis of these three historical examples has shown that operational maneuver can be used to create the decisive point. Furthermore, it has shown that there are factors that led to operational maneuver creating the decisive point. Having now examined operational maneuver and its relationship to the decisive point from a historical perspective, let us now examine current U.S. Army doctrine to see how it relates operational maneuver to the decisive point.

If one examines U.S. Army doctrine concerning operational maneuver and decisive point as stated in FM 100-5, he can make four observations. First, the doctrine recognizes and uses the term decisive point, but it does not define the term. In the section that concerns the conduct of campaigns and major operations it says

In open warfare, large unit commanders conduct aggressive reconnaissance and employ advance security forces to preserve their freedom of action. In trying to mass decisive strength at the decisive point, commanders maintain contact with the enemy and adjust their movements to conceal their intentions and to bring their forces to bear against an enemy vulnerability.(29)

Thus, the doctrine acknowledges that during the conduct of a campaign or major operation, a force will try to hit the decisive point, but the doctrine does not state what this point is.



This has some serious implications. If an operational commander does not know what the decisive point is, then it will be very difficult for him either to anticipate it or to recognize it. Each of the historical examples showed how important it was for the operational commander to anticipate the decisive point in the course of his operation. In each case, this was done before the beginning of the operation. This writer believes that even though each of the victorious commanders in these historical examples probably did not know a formal definition of decisive point, they intuitively knew what the decisive points were and how to identify them. However, Napoleon and Manstein both are considered to be military geniuses. To train current and future operational commanders--men who may not be geniuses--how to anticipate and to recognize the decisive points in a field of campaign, they should not have to rely simply upon intuition about such an important concept. If the doctrine uses the term, then it should explicitly define it.

The second point about the doctrine is also about the decisive point. There are clearly different categories of decisive points. However, these categories are not recognized by the doctrine. As discussed earlier, Jomini wrote about two categories of decisive points: geographical decisive points and accidental points of maneuver. Both of these categories were illustrated in the historical examples. The maneuvers prior to the Battle of Ulm and

during the Battle of France both demonstrate examples of geographic decisive points, the Danube River at Donauwerth and the Lower Somme River at Abbeville, respectively. The maneuver that Manstein did in the Winter Campaign of 1943 demonstrates the accidental point of maneuver: the linkup of the double envelopment by the SS Panzer Corps and the 48th Panzer Corps was one and the encirclement of Mobile Group Popov by 40th Panzer Corps was another.

Schneider argues that there are three kinds of decisive points: physical, cybernetic, and moral. Physical decisive points are always physically tangible extensions of the terrain and are either geological or manmade points. The cybernetic ones are always manmade facilities that are used for command and control information processing. Finally, moral decisive points affect a force's will to fight with examples being a specific commander, medical facilities or a religious shrine.(30)

The cybernetic and moral decisive points that Schneider discusses are only special cases of his physical decisive point. Furthermore, his physical decisive point appears simply to be an extension of Jomini's geographic decisive point. Jomini's accidental point of maneuver is a discrete type of decisive point in itself.

It would be useful for training commanders if the doctrine clearly identified categories of decisive points. One type could be Schneider's physical decisive point, those

determined by either manmade or natural geographic features. The second type could be Jomini's accidental points of maneuver, determined by the positional relationship of forces. These two types capture the essence of the concept of decisive point. Additional categories would only become cumbersome without adding any more clarity.

The third point concerning operational maneuver doctrine is that it fails to link either the concept of operational maneuver or maneuver in general to the concept of the decisive point. FM 100-5 says that maneuver "...is the means of concentrating forces at the critical point..."(31) But what is the critical point? Doctrine does not define it. But as discussed earlier, the process of massing forces, particularly prior to battle, is really operational maneuver. Clearly, the intent of operational maneuver is to get the right forces in the right place before each battle of a campaign. These places should be the points that provide the maximum advantage to the operational level force once it is in this position. If these points are chosen properly by the operational commander, not only will he achieve an advantage over the enemy force against which he is maneuvering, he will also gain a decision: a decisive point. Thus, there should be a clear linkage between the concepts of both maneuver and operational maneuver to the concept of the decisive point.

The final point concerns the prerequisites for operational maneuver to create the decisive point. To perform successful operational maneuver, the doctrine implies that operational commanders must know the terrain, enemy and friendly forces, anticipating the actions of the latter two well in advance of a proposed operational maneuver. Actually to conduct the maneuver requires an effective command and control (C2) system that employs flexible operational practices to move large formations to great depths. During the actual maneuver, which requires greater relative mobility than the enemy, the force must be protected from enemy forces, particularly air forces and at times sea forces. Backing the element that is maneuvering must be a very reliable logistics support apparatus. (32)

The three historical examples discussed earlier illustrated the importance of these prerequisites for operational maneuver. But there may be other factors besides these that come into play when operational maneuver is linked to the decisive point. As illustrated by the Battle of France in 1940, surprise and a concentrated attack by a very strong force at a very weak point in the enemy line can certainly facilitate an operational maneuver to the decisive point. Furthermore, Manstein's Winter Campaign in 1943 illustrates that a commander may have to take significant risk in order to posture his forces so that they can ultimately perform an operational maneuver to the

decisive point. Thus, the current doctrine identifies prerequisites for operational maneuver, but with the clear linkage of operational maneuver to the decisive point, the list of prerequisites may not be complete. There appear to be other factors such as risk taking, surprise and a strong attack at a weak point that are also important in leading to closure by operational maneuver upon the decisive point.

## V. Conclusions.

Operational maneuver can be used to create the decisive point in a campaign or prior to a battle. In order to reach this decisive point, an operational commander must anticipate what the enemy will do just as Napoleon and Manstein did, calculate what his own capabilities are, then develop a plan to hit this decisive point.

The plan should use an indirect approach that takes the body of the force along a "line of least expectation" that will produce a "line of least resistance".(33) This was exactly what the Germans did in 1940 in the Battle of France. Preparatory to the main maneuver, some deception or feint should take place to lure the enemy off balance such as Napoleon did using Murat and Ney to fix the Austrians prior to the Battle of Ulm. Furthermore, the operational commander may have to take considerable risk to set the stage for the operational maneuver to the decisive point as Manstein did when he concentrated all of his tanks, leaving the Mius River position with a minimum of panzer forces.

Once the main effort is launched, it should move with great speed to that anticipated point--the decisive point--that "unhinges" the enemy force or plan. The convergence--or concentration--of the force upon this point produces the advantage that leads to the decision, thus the operational maneuver creates the decisive point.

U.S. Army doctrine implies such a sequence of events, but it fails to link the concept of operational maneuver with the concept of decisive point. Clearly the two concepts are linked. Furthermore, the doctrine implies the existence of decisive points, but it neither defines the term decisive point nor does it elaborate on the requirements for either anticipating or recognizing this point. Jomini and Schneider both discuss categories of decisive points. However, this writer suggests that the best of both writers be combined with the result being two categories of decisive points: physical decisive points and accidental points of maneuver.

Furthermore, the doctrine provides a list of prerequisites for operational maneuver. However, when the concept of operational maneuver is linked to the concept of the decisive point, this list may not be complete. There may be other factors such as risk taking, surprise and strenght against weakness that are also very important in making the connection between these two concepts.

In closing, if we, as an Army, expect to be able to fight and win in the next campaign or on the next battlefield then we must continue to study and to practice the tools of the operational art. These will show the utility of concepts such as operational maneuver and the decisive point. These two concepts are certainly linked in practice, but as shown, our doctrine does not tie them

together as they rightfully should be. Steps should be taken now to establish this connection. The first step in this process will be to define the term decisive point. With a clear definition of decisive point which is linked with operational maneuver, the U.S. Army will provide its current and future operational commanders with some very powerful tools for fighting and winning on the Airland Battlefield.

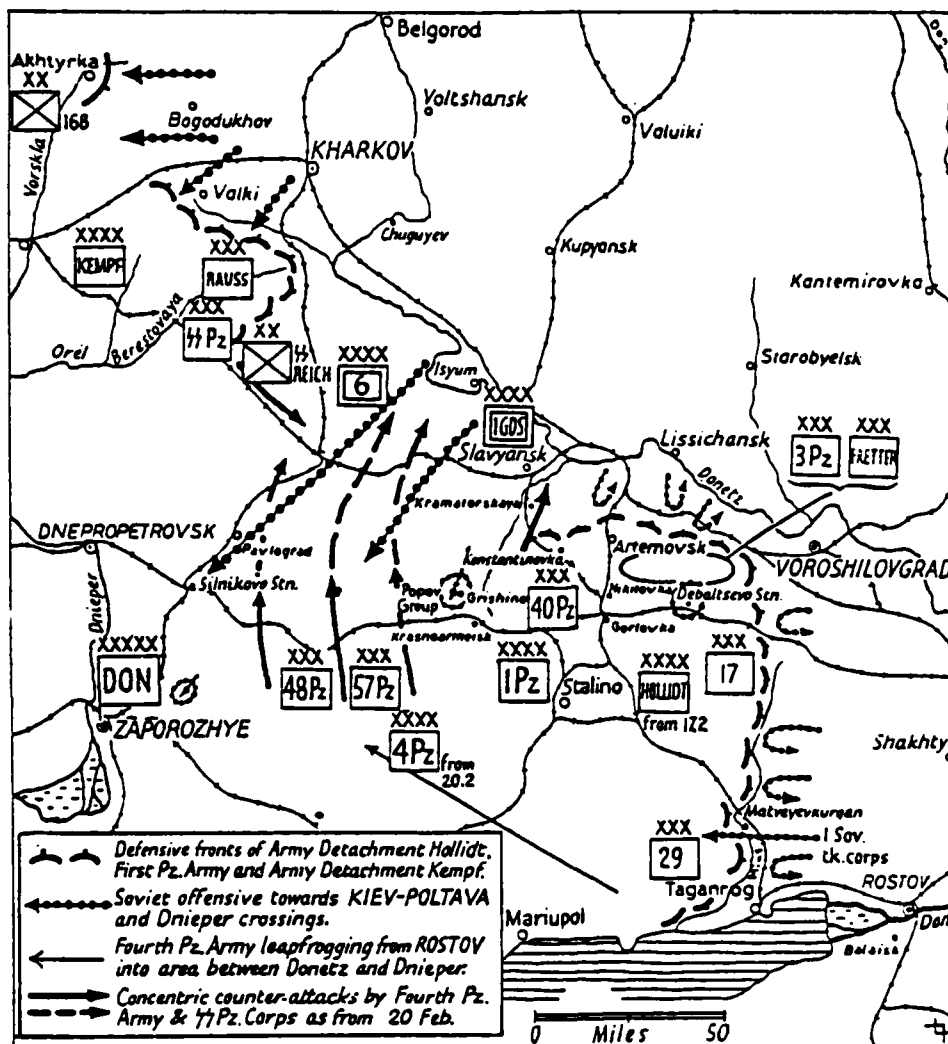


The Battle of France (35)



# MAP C

## Manstein's Winter Campaign in 1943 (36)



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